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SUBJECT: DATE FOR LOCAL ELECTIONS STILL LINGERS

REFS: A. Belgrade 1657 B. Belgrade 1504 C. Belgrade 1552

Summary

11. (SBU) Although first and second round Presidential elections are scheduled for January 20, and February 3, 2008, Serbia's Parliament Speaker has yet to call for local elections. Parliament first must pass a series of laws before the Speaker can call local elections. Although some analysts believe holding local elections in conjunction with a second round of presidential elections would help the Democratic Party (DS) Presidential candidate Boris Tadic by bringing more democratic bloc party voters to the polls, the DS has done little prep work to make this happen, and other parties remain skeptical. End Summary.

Requirements of the Constitutional Law

12. (SBU) Article 3 of the Constitutional Law states that local elections are to be announced by the Speaker of Parliament by December 31, 2007, or no later than 60 days after the amendment of the laws regulating the territorial organization of Serbia, local self-administration, local elections, and the status of the capital city. The Constitutional law also says that elections for the Vojvodina Provincial Assembly are to be announced by the Speaker of Parliament by December 31, 2007, or no later than 60 days after the amendment of the law on territorial organization of Serbia. To date parliament has yet to pass any of this required legislation.

DS Wants to Pass Required Legislation

13. (SBU) The Democratic Party (DS) wants to pass the required legislation and move forward with local elections, according to local media and some DS officials. It is unclear, however, if the DS will be able to do so since the legislation is still with the Government for its consideration before it is forwarded on to Parliament. Parliament Speaker and DS member Oliver Dulic told the media on December 20 that the constitutional law obligated him to schedule all elections by the end of the year, but he gave no indication of when the elections would be held. DS MP, Konstantin Samafolov told poloff on December 20 that parliament would be prepared to consider the necessary legislation during the week of December 24. He speculated, however, that even if the assembly passed the legislation, local and Vojvodina elections would not occur until spring 2008. DS MPs Gordana Comic and Srdjan Milivojevic, however, made no mention of local elections during a separate meeting with poloff on December 20. Suzana Grubjesic, head of the G-17 Plus parliamentary caucus and government coalition partner, told poloff on December 17 that it was unlikely that the legislation would be passed by the end of the year, and she did not expect local elections until the spring.

14. (SBU) Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica's Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) is waiting until its Main Board meets the weekend of December 22 to discuss next steps on elections, but for now all options remain on the table. DSS MP Aligrudic told poloff on December 20 that these issues would only be decided once Kostunica met with the board, but after DSS decided whether to support Tadic (septel), the DSS and DS "would then get on with local and provincial elections." The DSS walked out of parliament on December 21. Local media speculated that the walkout was at least partially motivated by the possibility that local elections were being considered and to buy the DSS time to respond. Radical Party (SRS) leader Tomislav Nikolic told local media on December 20 that if the DS planned to tie local elections with the second round of the presidential election, it would be an "imprudent and rotten idea." According to local media B-92, Nikolic thinks that the DS is afraid of electoral defeat and wants to increase turn out in a second round by calling local elections.

Polls in Kosovo?

15. (SBU) Perhaps the least considered and most problematic aspect of local elections is whether they would be held in Kosovo. The GOS, via its Coordination Center for Kosovo, worked with UNMIK most recently to open polling stations in Kosovo during the October 2006 referendum and the January 2007 parliamentary elections. The acting head of the UN liaison office in Belgrade told poloff December 20 that the GOS had made no inquiries and, in his estimation, was completely unprepared to arrange local elections in Kosovo by February 2008.

Comment

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16. (SBU) Parliament will need to act quickly if it wishes to arrange for local elections to be held on February 3, 2008, in conjunction with a second round vote for President. With legislation still in the hands of the government, post expects that only a unified political decision by all coalition partners to move forward could make February local elections possible. Beyond weighing the value that simultaneous elections would have on the outcome in the presidential election, the DS has given little thought to the impact local elections would have on the Kosovo decision process, the resulting composition of local governments, and how Serbia intends to resolve the thorny issue of voting in Kosovo. End Comment.

MUNTER